

AN INTERNATIONAL & INDUSTRY LIAISON PUBLICATION

JAMAICA ACCEDES TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON THE HARMONIZED CODING AND DESCRIPTION SYSTEM



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JAMAICA'S ACCESSION

On July 16, 2025, Jamaica deposited its instrument of accession to the International Convention on the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS) with the World Customs Organization (WCO), becoming the 163rd Contracting Party to the Convention following Cabinet's approval. Jamaica is also only the 3rd Member State of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to accede to the convention. The Harmonized System Convention will come into effect in Jamaica on June 1, 2026.

Jamaica had already been utilizing the Harmonized System (HS), however, this accession will serve to further enhance our customs tariff and statistical nomenclature.



Currently, over 200 economies, customs and economic unions use the HS as a basis for their national customs tariffs and collection of trade data. As a Contracting Party, Jamaica will be represented on the Harmonized System Committee (HSC) and the Harmonized System Review Sub-Committee. This will allow Jamaica to participate in the maintenance and review of the HS. These committees examine proposals for amendments and address questions regarding the scope and application of the HS.

THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON THE HARMONIZED COMMODITY DESCRIPTION & CODING SYSTEM (HS CONVENTION)

The International Convention on the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System Convention (HS Convention) came into force on January 1, 1988. The primary roles of the HS Convention are:

- To facilitate international trade by harmonizing the description, classification and coding of goods. The HS is the method used to classify traded goods for Customs Tariffs.
- To enable effective collection, comparison, and analysis of trade statistics.
- To significantly reduce costs associated with international trade.
- To promote the standardization of trade documentation and enhance the transmission of data.

Did You Know?

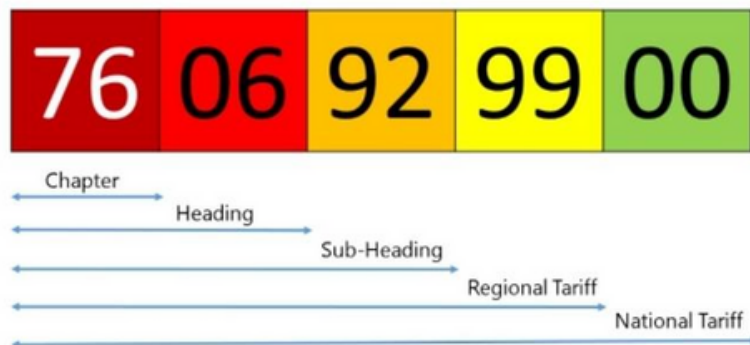
Important Uses of the HS

- Determination of duty treatment
- Establishing Rules of Origin
- Trade negotiations
- Monitoring of controlled goods e.g. waste, narcotics, ozone depleting substances, endangered species
- Core Customs processes e.g. risk management, entry processing
- Collection of trade statistics





The Structure of the Harmonized System of Classification



STRUCTURE OF THE HS CONVENTION

The HS Convention comprises a Preamble, 20 Articles and an Annex.

- The Preamble explains the reasons why the international community supported the adoption of the Harmonized System (HS), including the desire to facilitate international trade, lowering the cost associated with re-describing, reclassifying and recoding goods as they transition between classification systems during international trade and consideration for changes in technology.
- The 20 Articles outline the obligations of Contracting Parties (CP), the roles of the Council and the Harmonized System Committee (HSC), the process for resolving disputes between Contracting Parties, and the procedures for making amendments.
- The Annex is the HS Nomenclature itself. Contracting Parties are required to ensure that their customs tariffs and statistical nomenclatures, for both imports and exports, align with the Harmonized System. Additionally, at a minimum, they should publicly release their import and export trade statistics in accordance with the six-digit codes of the Harmonized System.



WHO CAN JOIN THE HS CONVENTION?

The following are eligible to become a Contracting Party to the HS Convention:

- Member States of the WCO Council, which is comprised of the Directors General from the 186 Customs Administrations that have acceded to the Convention Establishing a Customs Cooperation Council.
- Customs Unions or Economic Unions, such as the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and the European Union (EU).



- Invited representatives of any other state, intergovernmental and other international organizations and any other expert, as required. This subset may act as observers only, as they are not permitted to vote.



Sitting of the 75th Session of the Harmonized System Committee (HSC)

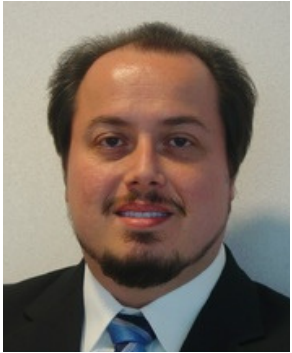
THE HARMONIZED SYSTEM COMMITTEE (HSC)

The Harmonized System Committee (HSC) is a body that was established by the WCO when the International Convention on the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System came into existence. The Committee comprises representatives from the Contracting Parties to the HS Convention and meets twice per year to review the Harmonized System (HS) and recommend amendments. The amendments aim to:

- Reflect developments in technology and changes in trade patterns and capture trade data for emerging issues, for example, the creation of a new subheading at tariff heading 8517.13 and chapter note for smartphones.
- Ensure consistency and uniformity in the interpretation and application of the HS by Contracting Parties, including the settlement of classification disputes.

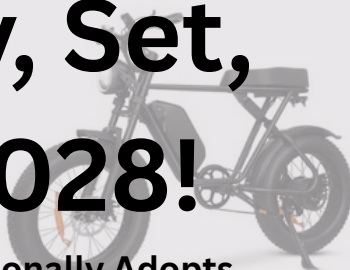
As a Contracting Party, Jamaica can now engage in decision-making regarding the HS at the highest level.

The HS Committee, led by a chairperson elected from among the delegates, examines issues based on documents prepared by the Secretariat. These documents include comments and proposals from various administrations.



Mr. Tom Peter Beris
Chairperson, HSC

Each member of the Committee may nominate one delegate and one or more alternates to represent them. These representatives should be officials who are responsible for and specialized in matters related to HS classification.



Ready, Set, HS 2028!

**HSC Provisionally Adopts
Recommendation for HS 2028 at 75th
Session**

HS 2028 will officially take effect on January 1, 2028. The HS is usually reviewed every 5 years, however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, entry into force will be in 2028 rather than 2027.

This update to the HS Nomenclature reflects over 299 amendments, covering changes in technology, health, environment, pharmaceuticals and security.

Exciting changes include the assignment of their own HS code for new products such as e-bikes, drones, cleaning robots; new classifications for vaccines, plastic waste and other health-related items.



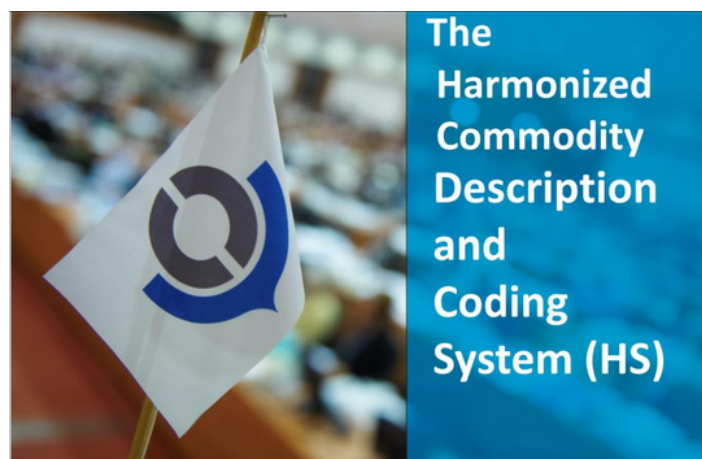
FUNCTIONS OF THE HARMONIZED SYSTEM COMMITTEE (HSC)

The HS Committee operates under the overall guidance of the WCO Council and Policy Commission. It receives administrative support from the WCO Secretariat and strives to carry out its responsibilities, which include:

- Proposal of amendments to the Convention that may be deemed necessary, particularly considering user needs and changes in technology or patterns of international trade.
- Preparation of Explanatory Notes, Classification Opinions, or other guidance to aid in the interpretation of the Harmonized System.
- To make recommendations that ensure uniformity in the interpretation and application of the Harmonized System.
- Collection and dissemination of information regarding the application of the Harmonized System.
- Provision of information or guidance on matters concerning the classification of goods within the Harmonized System to Contracting Parties, Council Members, and other intergovernmental or international organizations deemed appropriate by the Committee, either on its own initiative or upon request.
- To present reports to each session of the Council detailing its activities, including proposed amendments, Explanatory Notes, Classification Opinions, and other guidance.

- To exercise any additional powers and functions relating to the Harmonized System as the Council or the Contracting Parties may consider necessary.

The Committee's activities are supported by the Review Sub-Committee, which updates the HS, the Scientific Sub-Committee for chemical matters, the Working Party responsible for drafting the Explanatory Notes, Classification Opinions, and the Nomenclature and Classification Sub-Directorate.



GENERAL BENEFITS OF ACCESSION

- Trade facilitation through the reduction of costs and paperwork by creating a common language for classifying goods and simplifying international trade.
- Increased predictability by providing a standardized system for classification, which provides businesses with greater certainty regarding tariffs and customs requirements.



BENEFITS

- Improved efficiency through the provision of a common framework, which will lead to more efficient customs processes.
- The reduction of inconsistencies and simplification of procedures translates to lower costs for businesses involved in international trade.

ADVANTAGES OF BEING A CONTRACTING PARTY

As a Contracting Party, Jamaica, through the Jamaica Customs Agency, will:

- Have access to technical assistance, including training, conversion of the existing nomenclature to align with the HS, guidance on keeping our HS updated and implementation of the Convention.
- Have increased access to global expertise in classification from leaders in the field.
- Be strategically positioned, at the table, to voice concerns and raise issues with respect to the classification of goods and the implementation of classification decisions and opinions.
- Be able to table goods/items of national interest for consideration by the HS Committee for classification advice and amendments to the HS and its Legal and Explanatory notes.
- Have the legal authority to use the HS, including in matters before the judiciary.

THE HARMONIZED SYSTEM AND YOU



To achieve our Vision and Mission, the JCA relies heavily on its most valuable resource, our Officers, to accurately utilize tools, such as the HS, to meet the Agency's international obligations.

Officers are encouraged to ensure accurate classification of traded goods, thus allowing the correct application of trade, tariff and regulatory treatment. This also enhances risk management and security. The consistent, uniform application of the HS increases transparency, enhances accountability and predictability for all our stakeholders.

By so doing, every officer of the JCA not only contributes to our success as a leading Customs administration, but also contributes positively towards nation-building and the protection of our society.



Did You Know?

The Accession Process

- The JCA undertook a period of comprehensive stakeholder consultation regarding acceding to the HS Convention; feedback from which was taken into consideration.
- The requisite cabinet submission was tabled and approved.
- Jamaica's instrument of accession was prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Foreign Trade (MFAFT), and signed by the Minister of that Ministry.
- The signed instrument of accession was then submitted to the Embassy of Jamaica & Mission to the European Union in Brussels, to be deposited with the WCO.

References:

<https://www.wcoomd.org/zh-cn/topics/nomenclature/instrument-and-tools/hs-nomenclature-2022-edition.aspx>

<https://www.wcoomd.org/en/topics/nomenclature/overview.aspx>

https://www.wcoomd.org/en/topics/nomenclature/instrument-and-tools/hs_convention.aspx

The International & Industry Liaison Branch (IILB) is committed to raising awareness on topics relating to the International Trade, as well as issues concerning the Caribbean Community which may affect our internal and external stakeholders. Our quarterly Newsletter seeks to highlight global trade topics and their importance to Customs Administrations worldwide, specifically as it relates to the Jamaica Customs Agency.

As we realize our vision to becoming a modern customs administration delivering excellent service, we recognize the importance of knowledge transfer in delivering our objectives and use this forum as one way of contributing the vision of Jamaica Customs Agency (JCA). The IILB is located at JCA's Head Office, and our officers are available to respond to your trade-related queries. **Contact us at:** iilu@jca.gov.jm.

